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Kehr, Cyrus

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[Washington, D.C.]

[1920]

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A NATION PLAN

A Basis for

All Local Planning

BY
CYRUS KEHR
WASHINGTON, D. C.

An address delivered before the American Civic Association, at Amherst, Massachusetts, October 14, 1920.

M. W. L. Aug. 13, '23.

A Nation Plan

Kindly bear in mind that in the short time available for this address merely an outline of this subject can be given.

For these meetings, we have come to a region of good rural community life. The program of this convention has been prepared with a view to emphasizing the importance of the farming community and the village. It is important that these be brought to their best. For patriotic as well as for humanitarian reasons, strong civic effort should be directed toward the betterment of conditions in the rural places.

If the people of every locality make effort for local improvement, that will tend to improve conditions throughout the Nation.

Love for ones own local community is accounted commendable. That love is one of our dominant characteristics.

Rudyard Kipling says:

> "God gave all men all earth to love,
> But since their hearts are small,
> Ordained for each one place
> Should prove beloved over all."

I am here to urge that, by studying the entire Nation, our hearts should grow large enough to love the entire Nation and love that "one place" yet more than now.

I am here to urge that no local community can be brought to its best without taking into consideration the welfare of every other local community in the entire country; that the local community must, for selfish reasons, lay aside selfishness and give itself over to broad altruistic thought and effort relative to all parts of our Nation; that to produce the best conditions for the "one

place" which you love and for the "one place" which I love, a large number of factors national in character require co-ordinated treatment with reference to the entire National area.

Every place in the country must be a good place to live in or the place in which we live will not be a good place in which to live.

To be direct, I am here to further urge my proposal for "A Nation Plan" which is to be a basis for co-ordinated national development, and which development is to include every rural community and village and to produce a richer rural life than can be had through isolated, local effort.

This proposal was presented by me at the annual convention of the American Civic Association in December, 1915.

A few definitions will tend to avoid misunderstanding concerning the nature of the proposed Nation Plan:

(First). Planning here and there in a disconnected way at many places throughout the Nation would not produce a Nation Plan.

Local planning is not Nation Planning.

(Second). The Nation Plan will not include the planning of cities, towns, villages, or local rural areas. Such planning is to be left to later local effort.

(Third). To produce a Nation Plan, we must form a unitary framing or plan structure extending over the entire national area and composed of inter-related factors or elements having national significance, and through such structure create an inter-relationship between any local district or region and any other local district or region in the Nation.

(Fourth). The Nation Plan will prepare the way for and stimulate and inspire local planning.

(Fifth). The Nation Plan will not be concerned merely with providing better communication between present "large centers of population." Some who discuss national highways have in mind only highways connecting present large cities. Only recently a highway specialist, with whom I discussed my proposal, said that a number of states will not be interested at all; for example, Mississippi. Why? "Because Mississippi has no centers."

But, since the aim of the plan will be to reduce tendency to further concentration at present large cities and the aim will further be to invite the development of a large number of relatively small cities, "focal points" or "centers" will be chosen approximately equi-distant from each other, regardless of present population. Thus states like Mississippi will be given "centers" and treatment to create conditions intended to invite the location of population and industries. In other words, the Nation Plan will *aim to encourage the occupation of the places which are not yet densely occupied.*

Also let it be noted that this subject can not be properly approached without recognizing the fact that *selfishness* avails nothing to any one. This applies to communities as well as to individuals.

Formerly landscape planning was restricted to the vacant part of a city residence lot or to larger "grounds" surrounding a residence. Later the efforts of planners seldom extended beyond the replanning of cities and towns, effort being applied chiefly to the area of the town or city and dealing mainly with the correction of defects for the purpose of adapting the place to increased population. Still later some planners ventured to take note of the fact that by growth towns and cities extend over surrounding areas, and the planners accordingly dared to

put plan features over a belt immediately adjoining the present rim of the city—such a belt receiving the name of "twilight zone." Recently there has been recognition of more extended relation between a town or city and the lands surrounding it, so that some planners have departed from precedent sufficiently to discuss "regional planning," this term meaning the planning of the area that surrounds a city and is immediately tributary thereto industrially.

Humanity interest has passed neighborhood limits and extended progressively until it has become nation-wide and world-wide. Planning, whether for town or country, must be made to conform to this expanded interest.

At a recent national gathering of persons interested in city planning and kindred subjects, this question of "regional planning" was discussed by a number of speakers as the final reach in physical expansion of planning. That discussion overlooked:

> (First). The fact that, if planning proceeded on the lines recommended by those speakers, every present city would be surrounded by a planned area outside of which would be an ignored "no-man's land" left to develop, or not develop, without direction and with no relation to other areas;
>
> (Second). The fact that many of the more serious defects in a city are to be remedied not by planning in the city but externally thereto—in some cases far away from the city;
>
> (Third). The basic fact that no city can be brought to its best without the fullest possible inter-relation with all other cities of the entire Nation; that for social and industrial reasons, every city needs the best possible communication with all parts of the Nation and with all parts of the world, because the fullest mental and spiritual development of the people of the city can be attained only by such communication; and for industrial advancement the city needs the best possible facilities to deliver its industrial products to all parts of the Nation and to all parts of the world and to receive the products of all parts of the world and all parts of the Nation;
>
> (Fourth). That the Nation needs an approximately even distribution of population, and that that is to be sought through giving extended interrelation to a large number of places with a view to adapting them to city development, and that in the planning of a city, first consideration must be given to this extended external relationship;
>
> (Fifth). That our most important and most costly physical service, affecting all interests, is transportation; that good transportation at low cost is essential to the prosperity of the local community, and such transportation can be provided to the local community only by arranging a transportation system extending over the entire country.

The following, bearing upon this question of transportation, is from a recent address delivered by Mr. Herbert Hoover before the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers:

> "A problem of even more pressing importance than these is the whole question of transportation. Our inability to move the commodities which we create is stifling production. It is increasing the cost of distribution and has placed a tax on the American people in decreased production and increased cost of distribution greater than all the taxes imposed by the war."

It should not now require much effort to reach the view that the towns and cities of a *state* should not be planned individually until by a broader plan all the towns and

cities of the state are inter-related for the best possible communication between any one and any other of those places. But it will be seen that such a state plan would not be sufficient; that all the towns of the state need interrelation with all the towns of the entire Nation; that every town in the state needs a *national setting;* that, therefore, we must omit the state plan and pass from the city plan to the Nation Plan.

The reasons for the larger plan will perhaps be better understood if I briefly state the conception and elaboration and embodiment in a book manuscript of my proposal.

But before proceeding with that recital, let us place before us prominently the facts that, for the preparation of the Nation Plan, the Nation is to be regarded as a unitary administrative, social and industrial organism similar to a city—let us say it is a city.

There is first this main fact: Ten years or more ago, while studying various highway and railway and city questions, I always observed that the particular matter under consideration *was dependent upon other matters territorially outside of the first matter;* that those territorially extraneous matters also required consideration; that a particular piece or section of highway, whether long or short, could not be considered by itself, but must be considered in relation with other highways and with other means of communication. In some instances it was seen that a congested highway did not itself need treatment for the relief of its congestion; because the proper treatment of another highway, or perhaps several other highways, would relieve the congestion on the first highway. In other instances it was seen that a highway which was considered of large importance

would become of minor importance after proper location and treatment of other highways which were needed for the public convenience.

In considering railroads, the fact presented itself that every railroad and every part of a railroad is dependent upon other railroads and upon other means of transportation and upon other physical features which are not railroad features. The same may be said regarding waterways. A waterway considered by itself may have small value, its proper functioning depending upon interrelation with other waterways, with highways, and with railways and other physical features.

It was also seen that in some cases local congestion and other defects in cities could be eliminated without local treatment, but through such treatment as was necessary, for other considerations, in other parts of the city. I also noted that the planning for a city could not be made complete without placing the city into proper relation with the surrounding country and with neighboring centers or cities. It was noted that in many cases defects or unfavorable conditions of a city can be cured best or only by physical treatment outside of and in some cases relatively remote from the city.

Thus I saw that scarcely any individual problem or project could be considered independently of other factors; that it must be put into relation with extraneous factors. This led to the suggestion that no local problem can receive its proper treatment until a territorially larger basis or background has been formed. Along with this came the conviction that the economic and social defects throughout our country are, in large measure, due to the fact that heretofore we have planned and made effort in a local way, the result being insufficient and unbalanced national communication.

In thus proceeding from the small to the larger and yet larger, the need of a larger and larger basis or background was presented, until it was finally seen that the entire national area should be taken as an original basis or unit for physical planning, the planning proceeding on a diminishing scale—from the major to the minor. And then it was seen that even our Nation, considered as a stupendous unit, can not be properly planned by itself, but that a plan for the entire Nation should be inter-related with plans for Canada and Mexico and should be related by sea communication lines with islands and other continents.

Further study also showed that, as political ward or borough boundaries must be ignored in city planning, so in the preparation of this larger plan, state capitals and state boundaries must be ignored.

It was seen that in some cases a city other than a state capital will be better suited to become a focal point or center for well-arranged national communication lines and to provide conditions which will invite the location of population and industries. It was also seen that the mere size of a city must not control in the choosing of centers or focal points; for it is probable that some cities have grown large through unwarranted artifical conditions which favored those locations, and because the Nation needs more focal points—more cities—than the present number, in order that the population may be distributed more nearly evenly throughout the Nation, and in order that the number of objectionably large cities may be limited.

It was also seen that, for the best fixing of focal points and the prescribing of best communication between those points and to permit best communication throughout the entire nation, individual communication lines must not be extended across the entire national area; that a communication line connecting two adjacent or neighbor focal points must be treated as an individual national "communication unit"—a "trunk-line"—and that when all the "focal points" have been thus connected by these individual communication units, we shall have a system of "communication units" or "trunk-line units" forming a comprehensive and balanced means of communication covering the entire country.

Formerly highways were relatively local. Gradually there has appeared a demand for longer range highway travel, and this has prompted proposals for main highways extending from coast to coast and from one national boundary to the other—lines "extending due east and west and due north and south." This would make the "checkerboard" arrangement which it has been found should not exist in cities, some cities having found it necessary to go to very large expense to add focal points and diagonal communication lines to their "checkerboard" system.

Our railroads have been located (not planned) in rivalry and without effort to inter-relate them. As a result, we have no railway system. Study in this connection revealed the fact that a real national system of railways can be formed only by adopting focal points and connecting those points by individual railway units. It was seen that this procedure will result in a balanced system of railways affording the best possible railway transportation from any part to any other part of the country.

And a study of national conditions revealed the fact that our largest national social and economic defects are due to unequal distribution of population and industries and that those defects are due to defective communication and to lack of places having conditions inviting the

location of population and industries. At present there are cities having harmful, deteriorating congestion of population, and the transportation lines leading to such cities are congested, while in many other places our people live in small numbers and harmful isolation. It became clear that there should be a decentralization and distribution of population and that a balanced distribution of population and industries will make possible a reduction of congestion on transportation lines; because (first) the number of carrying lines will be increased, and (second) the distances between production and consumption will be reduced and the carrying distances thereby made shorter.

This study also led to consideration of the fact that our Nation is in a formative condition and is rapidly increasing in population; that in approximately sixty years another one hundred millions will be added, and that this prospective addition emphasizes the necessity for effort toward distribution through the formation of a large number of centers—potential cities—all provided with the best possible means of communication with all other parts of the Nation—every center having the best communication with every other center.

And it was seen that sea transportation touches the interests of all the people and that it cannot serve all the people excepting through internal transportation means connected with seaports (sea gateways); and that therefore it is essential to the bringing of any community to its best, that there be a nation-wide internal transportation system joined to the largest possible number of good seaports.

Thus I reached the Nation Plan project comprising focal points, including seaports, and communication units connecting the focal points and forming a "triangular

composition" constituting a balanced national communication system which should be supplemented by local planning dealing with population centers and communication lines which will be auxiliary to the centers and communication lines of the national system.

The above-mentioned "triangular composition" will be a vital feature of the National Plan. The focal points or centers are to be connected by three's, whereby triangles will be formed and every center will be touched by one apex of each of a group of triangles. On the plan maps, neighbor centers are to be connected by straight "experimental lines." The communication lines are then to be located complementary to and as nearly coincident with the experimental lines as topography and other considerations permit.

To illustrate, let us suppose that Indianapolis, Columbus and Cincinnati are chosen as centers for forming such a triangle and that a second triangle is formed by choosing Detroit as a center and connecting it with Indianapolis and Columbus.

As above stated, the transportation lines connecting neighbor centers are to be treated as national communication units. All such units are to be located, designed and built with a view to permanence and such capacity as will be demanded by a national transportation system under present and future conditions. In view of the large traffic demands to be made on highways, these trunk-line highways should be superior in construction to any ever before built, not excepting the famous Roman roads. Railway construction must also be brought to its best. Much of present construction is inferior. And fullest effort must be made to bring the highways, railways, and waterways into co-ordination or complementary inter-relation with each other.

While this triangular system of communication lines will provide the best communication for peace times, it will also be the best that can be devised for military movement. For movements over considerable distances there will be choice of routes, and large movements can simultaneously use several approximately parallel routes.

Not only will the Nation Plan provide a balanced national system of transportation comprising the inter-related highways, railways, and waterways, but it will also have the very important function of forming a basis for planning which will be auxiliary to it, and whereby every locality will receive planning treatment which is best for local purposes and which will give that locality its best relation to near surroundings and to the entire national area.

Every center or focal point will present an area for a city or metropolitan district plan. Thus every triangle will have a relatively small area detached at each apex and made a part of a city plan area. The remainder of each triangle is to be treated in detail for the development of subordinate centers and communication lines brought into proper relation with each other and with the major centers and communication lines of the same triangle. This will lead to the best that can be done for smaller towns and for the creation of good rural life conditions.

Perhaps some one may raise the question whether it is possible to make a plan covering so large a territorial area. Will any one say that our Nation is too large for unitary governmental administration? A large number of governmental functions extending in a connected way over the entire national area are being administered, and no reason is seen why this additional function should be impracticable on account of geographical magnitude. We have individual railways extending more than half way

across the continent, and we have railways which have been operated in groups extending across the Nation. Indeed, recently all the principal railways of the entire country were operated by a single federal authority. If these things can be done, it ought to be possible to frame railways to form a single national system. As to highways, at present a score of voluntary associations of citizens are engaged in the promotion of projects for highways which are to extend across the length or breadth of the country. If the contemplation of such projects is possible, should we not expect it to be feasible to develop sufficient breadth of vision to deal with the creation of a network of trunk-line highways reaching over the entire national area? And the people of various localities have given more or less consideration to the development of inland waterways, and Congress and the Corps of Engineers of the United States Army have given active attention to waterway questions in various parts of the country, some relating to projects for long waterways and others relating to the linking together of groups of waterways. If these relatively disconnected and yet large things can be done regarding waterways, are not the same minds capable of contemplating a single waterway scheme covering the entire national area? And if such vision may be had separately concerning railways and highways and waterways, is it visionary to suppose vision broad enough to treat inter-relation of a system of railways, a system of highways, and a system of waterways, each co-extensive with the national area? In this connection we must note the fact that the mental vision of our people is rapidly widening geographically. Only a generation ago the interests of nearly all people were confined largely to their own neighborhood. Nearly all needs were supplied from a small local area. Now there

is a nation-wide interchange of products, and the people have a knowledge and interest and sympathy covering the entire country. The people of every locality are neighbors to the people of every other locality.

If the triangles of the Nation Plan are made of such average size as to make the lengths of their sides approximately 150 miles, there will be about 300 or 350 "centers."

The need of broader vision is also recognized by Mr. Herbert Hoover in the above-mentioned address:

> "The time has arrived in our national development when we must have a definite national program in the development of our great engineering problems. Our rail and water transport, our water supplies for irrigation, our reclamation, the provision of future fuel resources, the development and distribution of electrical power, all cry out for some broad-visioned national guidance. We must create a national engineering sense of provision for the nation as a whole.
>
> * * * * * * * *
>
> "The devolpment of our transportation, fuel, power and water under private initiative has been one of the stimuli that have created the greatness of our people. It has been easy to compass when the problems were more local and filled with speculative profits. There, however, arises a time when this haphazard development must be co-ordinated in order to secure its best results to the nation as a whole. This system has given us a 50 per cent result; if we are to have 100 per cent we must have a national conception and national guidance. This last 50 per cent involves problems beyond individual initiative alone.
>
> * * * * * * * *

> "If, in the first instance, through an agency of the central government, we could have an adequate study and preparation of plan and method made of these problems of engineering development over the next fifty years, viewed solely in their national aspects, we would have taken the first step toward the adequate provision of an increasing standard of living and a lower cost of living for our descendants.

Forest reserves, national parks, irrigation, flood control, water power, a national electricity distribution system, and every phase of conservation in its national aspects, including the preservation of natural beauty, will have places in the Nation Plan.

The new national projects which the Nation Plan will prescribe, and the state and county and municipal projects which will come as auxiliaries to the Nation Plan, can at all times during the next fifty or one hundred years constitute a receiver for such labor as is not needed in other enterprises and the industries. Thus during industrial fluctuations there will be no need of unemployment.

Continuous employment for all the people of the United States is essential to contentment, good order and harmony. Let us quote further from Mr. Hoover's address:

> "Owing to seasonal and other irregularities of demand, the average term of employment in the bituminous industry is less than 190 days per annum. If this industry could be operated a normal work year 125,000 men could be turned to other production. It is an industry in which 30 per cent more capital is invested than would otherwise be necessary. The coast of coal to the consumer

> and the risks to the operator are greatly increased, and, above all, it presents a great human problem fraught with all the terrible misery and strikes and justified discontent that flow from intermittent employment."

During thousands of years, from the days of ancient Egypt and Babylon to the beginning of the last century, there was but a limited industrial improvement or unfolding. Nearly all our important inventions and discoveries were made during the last century. Having just passed through this marvelously large industrial unfolding, we are now ready for the next stage, namely; the social and human unfolding, the utilization of the industrial gifts and revelations for the betterment of humanity.

This task of human unfolding must not be approached in a fragmentary or disconnected way. It must be carried on according to a comprehensive scheme, such as the Nation Plan will provide.

In conclusion, let us again turn to the fact that where we have excessive massing of population, there are bred discontent, unrest, discord, strikes, riots, other forms of crime, and perverted political activities. Bad environment produces inferior people.

The rural places have a vital interest not only in direct means for getting better conditions for themselves, but in *any means tending to prevent conditions in cities from becoming worse.*

For, according to a recent Census announcement, more than half of the people of the United States now reside in the cities, and cities are increasing in population *seven and a half times* as fast as the rural districts.

Control of government has passed to the people of the cities.

Is there not peril in this change?

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